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For More Information:

Eric Koster
ODU's Langley Full Scale Tunnel
757-766-2266, ext. 104
ekoster@odu.edu

Michael O'Hara
NASA Langley Research Center
757-864-8455

Ray White/Von Gilbreath
City of Hampton, Economic Dev.
757-727-6237
vgilbreath@hampton.gov

Rick Weigel/Dara Glass
Peninsula Alliance for Economic Dev.
757-826-3327

Hampton Motorsports Technology Alliance: The Making of A Partnership

(Hampton, Virginia) - In pursuit of saving a technology resource, Old Dominion University's (ODU) College of Engineering and Technology, with support from the City of Hampton, began a quest to reopen and operate the closed NASA Langley Full Scale Tunnel (originally built in 1931) as a commercial testing facility. It was an excellent opportunity to provide ODU engineering graduate students with "real-world" learning experiences as well. Shortly after opening, the response was immediate from NASCAR teams interested in testing at the facility. Independent operation by ODU, allowed for reasonable pricing, excellent data correlation, largest test section and a central East location. Within two and half years of its operation by ODU, the tunnel was successful in recouping all startup costs and generating surplus revenue. Efforts began to market the facility at industry trade shows around the late 1990s and the inquiries increased.

Based on this interest, the City of Hampton and ODU re-approached NASA Langley Research Center's Office of Technology Commercialization to participate in this cooperative marketing venture. NASA Langley Research Center officials saw this as an opportunity to access new potential customers with an interest in the commercialization of licensed NASA technologies. The Hampton Motorsports Technology Alliance was born. Most recently, the Peninsula Alliance for Economic Development has also joined the group because this industry also presents an excellent target market for the region.

To date, informal efforts have led to a United Kingdom delegation (eight executives representing elite motorsports companies) visiting Hampton last spring to explore potential collaborations and assess technologies. The group has also exhibited at motorsports related tradeshow in Indianapolis, Indiana; Detroit, Michigan; and the United Kingdom.

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